

*Anna Keyes Nailson*

REMEMBRANCES

My father's father, whom I never met, was James Hervey Keyes (1836-1901).

He was a Judge in the city of Oneonta, New York, where my father, James Elihue Keyes, was born January 7, 1870. He had an older brother, Hervey, and a younger sister, Anna. I was named for her and for my Grandmother, Adeliza. She, poor dear, died when Anna was only a year old, and my Grandfather married Laura Monfort of St. Paul, Minnesota. She raised all three children; did not have any of her own; and used to write to me and send me Christmas gifts when I was a child. My Cousin, Walter Goldsmith (only son of Anna), gave me this information and spoke with great affection for his Grandmother Laura. I think she came from a wealthy family, as there used to be heavily padded boxes for silver that had the name Monfort printed in gold.

James Keyes graduated from the College of Pharmacy in Philadelphia. I remember him telling of his apprenticeship in pharmacies of that day; he came out to Montana as a young man, working for Newbro & Co., and he used to say that he was on his feet so much he could not have worn out the seat of a pair of cheesecloth pants. As far as I know, my father never returned to his home. He said that when the estate was divided on his father's death, the bulk of it went to Hervey, because his father said, "Jim would always be able to take care of himself." I suspect that ill feeling between the boys may have been the reason for his continued absence from home, but I never had the wit to ask him and he was not one to talk very much. My father's sister, Anna, visited us on the ranch in 1915, and I remember that she traveled with a trunk, which I found quite impressive. I saw her one other time when Mel and I, Shirley and Jimmy were enroute to Europe. She came up to New York to see us, and took the children to Gimbel's for gifts. One of these was a little red cloth horse with white mane and tail. The children played with it by the hour, harnessing, unharnessing, decorating and imagining adventures. That little horse is still in my possession.

I think Aunt Anna was a woman of some determination; she belonged to the DAR and was anxious that I should do that too. She had blue-gray eyes with a somewhat steel-y expression, but she was always kind to me and wrote with some regularity over the years, sending money for Christmas gifts for the children. Her son, Walter, took up the correspondence after his mother's death, and I visited him and his wife when they wintered in Tuscon, Arizona.

I should not write "my" and "Mine", for of course all the relatives about whom I write are equally related to my sister, Bessie. However, the first person singular is more easily written, so I apologize to her.

Our mother, Bessie Parker, was born in Athlone, Ireland, and came out to Montana as a young girl of 18 or so. Two brothers, Tom and Steve Parker, preceded her, as did many Irish youth of that time.. (the potato famine in Ireland). The boys did well in the saloon business and retail stores, and sent for other family members, as fast as money would allow.

Our mother was thrown from a horse shortly after her arrival here, and this resulted in the amputation of one "limb" (the term used in those days). The attraction between her and my father must have been very strong for him to marry a girl with such a disability. Relatives have told me she had suitors standing in line for her attention and that she was most attractive. She had blue eyes and heavy, dark hair....I remember the homemade crutch she used, and the new, artificial "limb" that was supposed to be comfortable. I believe it never was....it wasn't even individually fitted, as it came

from a mail order house



*Dwina <sup>Kane</sup> Neilsen*  
*(first two pages not available 7-24-89)*

Life on a chicken ranch 1908 to 1918 is interesting today for its contrasts in life style. Our washing was done in a machine that had a series of wooden sticks which were rotated by someone turning a large wheel. It had to be filled by carrying hot water from the kitchen stove and was emptied by an ingenious device of my fathers. This consisted of a five gallon can from which one side had been removed, and a pipe attached to one end. This pipe went thru the wall on the back porch. We simply pulled plug on the lowest level of the washing machine. The water ran into the five gallon can and thence to the outside, where it watered a vegetable garden. We had a covered wash boiler into which white clothes were put, and brought to a boil on the stove. A clothesline in the back yard dried the wash quickly in the wind and the sun. The items needing ironing were sprinkled the night before ironing day. The stove was fired up and irons with detachable handles were heated and used in sequence. As one cooled, another took its place. A whole morning was set aside for this task, and as surely as Monday was washday, Tuesday saw the ironing...a hot job in the summer but one done with considerable pride in the end result.

Bathing was a Saturday night routine....water heated on the stove and a galvanized tub brought into the kitchen and set close to the stove. Bathers took turns and I never saw anyone else in the tub, as it was strictly a private affair, with my father bathing last. Morning face washing was accomplished with a wash basin on the edge of the stove. Originally we did not have water piped into the house, and I remember how pleased we were to have cold water at the sink.

Of course we had no indoor toilet, but went to the privy behind the feed house. Chamber pot was placed under each bed. The privy was treated with lime and had to be cleaned out once a year. Dad said he needed some alcoholic courage for that job.

I remember the coal oil lamps which had to be cleaned and filled each morning. Dad's reading light was special as it had a mantel and gave a white light. It was a great day when electric wires were strung up our land and into our house. A single cord hung from the center of the ceiling in each room, and an unshaded bulb gave us marvelous light, with no lamps to bother with. Curiosity overcame me one day and I stuck a silver butter knife into an empty socket. My lesson was instantaneous, and no one could ever fathom what put the nick into the edge of the butter knife.

Much of the food for our table was raised on the place, as we had a small orchard and a well-tended vegetable garden. Cucumbers and melons were



placed under a wet gunny sack at the foot of our fine oak tree. More perishable vegetables were put in an ingenious cooler under the cherry tree at the back door. This consisted of a set of shelves covered with burlap and a made-to-measure galvanized container placed on the top. Water went into this and gunny sacks draped from it down the sides of the cooler. Our butter never melted there, and was always spreadable. How simple it was and how effective; never needing the services of a mechanic and never getting out of order. There was a cupboard inside the house that was aerated and used during the coldest months..it was also called a cooler

A good supply of staples was on hand at all times, and a pad hung on the kitchen wall on which was written any items needed from town. Since not more than two trips a week, by horse and wagon, were made, it behooved the housekeeper not to run out of sugar or flour. We had another small closet into which were preserved vegetables and fruit that were home canned. I remember especially how attractive the canned cherries looked. An outbuilding housed squash potatoes, onions and apples. The latter were individually wrapped and placed in straw for keeping over the winter.

At one time we had a cow as well as a horse, but dad never cottoned to dairy work and her residence was short lived. The horse was named "Wash" after an uncle Washington who left dad a little money. He was allowed to graze on our driveway and terrified me when I came home from school as occasionally he would take out after me. The word "driveway" brings up another ingenious device on the ranch. A local man named Johnson invented a gate which opened when the front wheel of the wagon was driven over a U shaped metal trip. This allowed the driver of the wagon to go thru without getting out to open the gate. After driving thru a similar trip was pressed down by the wagon wheel, and behold, the gate closed. These were so handy I never understood why more farmers did not use them...ours was the only one in the neighborhood, and I was very proud of it. Men who trucked feed out to the ranch appreciated it too.

I must have been ten or eleven when Dad bought the first Ford in the lane. It was one-seated with a bonnet to protect the driver, and in back a rack was bolted to hold the egg cases. Dad devised a pulley which held a second seat; the rack could be removed and this seat lowered to the bed of the car. No side doors, and no top for this seat, but it had a good spot for a picnic basket and I was very proud of this conveyance.



Now we were able to take Sunday afternoon drives, and going to town was made easy. We kept "Wash", as he was needed for plowing and harrowing, and for occasional trips to move feed around the ranch.

In those days merchant's opened for buisness at 8 o'clock. I do not remember that I went to town very often as I would probably have been in dad's way while he conducted his business and stopped for a drink. One, day, however I was with him and he bought me a hat....the crown was black patent leather and the brim of black and white checked fabric. I purely loved that headpiece!



Anna Neilson

Our place was a small one, and my father never needed to hire outside labor so, as I grew up, my services were needed, and expected.

A yearly task was the planting of a couple acres of kale plants. The rows would be lined out with a cord; my father handled the spade and I inserted the plants; his foot closed the aperture, and we moved along briskly, row upon row. Tiring of bending, I might ask to use the spade, but that was unsatisfactory. The kale grew up on long stalks; the lower leaves were picked daily, chopped in an engine-driven kale-cutter, and fed to the chickens with their other feed. Occasionally the leaves of kale would be thrown whole into the yards, but the chickens wasted much of it. Kale-cutters accounted for many hand and finger injuries among the farmers & I recall great care being used when the cutter was in operation. I was never allowed to help with that.

My main task was to clean, weigh, sort the eggs by size and put them into <sup>wooden</sup> cases for shipping. The cases went to town twice a week. The set-up for this work was on the bottom floor of the tankhouse, and I remember the engine that pumped the water up into the tank from the well beneath. It never occurred to me to resent the task of "doing" the eggs, and on one occasion when I became too careless and broke too many, I was relieved of my job and felt absolutely desolated until I was reinstated.

Kindling chopping and wood carrying were the tasks of all farm children, and the wood stove had to be satisfied daily. To this day, I enjoy chopping kindling.

Our food was kept cool in a burlap-covered set of shelves. On the top of the frame was a galvanized iron container, cut to fit. This was kept filled with water and other burlap sacks draped from the water down over the frame. Set under a cherry tree, our butter never melted and was always spreadable. That same cherry tree supported the flapping body of the weekly beheaded chicken. Immersed in scaling water, the feathers were removed quickly, and I early learned how to eviscerate the bird. Because this was so routine and matter-of-fact, my appetite for fried chicken was never affected.

I walked the 3/4 mile to school in a sandy lane, carried my lunch in a very fine tobacco tin that had a hinged cover. When it rained, I HAD RUBBERBOOTS. AND AN UMBRELLA (caps accidental).

Anna Berge Neilson



RECORDED INTERVIEW  
OF  
ANNA KEYES NEILSEN  
by Cheryl Jern - August 8, 1989

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MS. JERN: Q Where were your parents born? Where were you born?

MS. NEILSEN: A My mother was born in Athlone, Ireland. Athlone is the exact geographical center of Ireland.

Q And do you know when she came to the United States?

A She was about 18 when she came. A potato famine in Ireland forced many to emigrate.

Q How many brothers did she have?

A She had two that I'm sure of.

Q And where did they move to when they first came?

A Butte, Montana and Anaconda, Montana.

Q Why?

A Mines were very active at that time.

Q What were they mining for?

A Copper.

Q How did your mother then get to Petaluma?

A Well, my father came out to Butte. He was a pharmacist. He had graduated from Pharmacy College in Philadelphia. He came to Butte because he wanted to come West, or because maybe an offer of a job. I don't know which. He met my mother at that time. It's interesting I just read novel, "Angel of Repose" by Wallace Stegner, which reminded me of my dad.

Q Did he work as a pharmacist?

A Yes.

Q For about how long?

A Oh, quite a few years I think, but I don't know how long. Then he got the itch to do a little mining himself and came down to Nevada.

Q Now, if I recall, didn't you and your mom stay in Montana and he came to Nevada?

A Yes. And then he sent for us.

Q How old were you at the time?

A Five.

Q Do you remember actually coming to California?

A I remember my mother's purse was stolen on the train.

Q How long had it been since you had seen your dad? It must have been shocking if it had been a long period of time.

A Yes. It had been a period of time. One or three years. I can't remember.

Q And how long did your family stay in Nevada?

A When he was alone he stayed in Nevada. Then he got itchy feet.

Q Then he moved to Petaluma?



A Yes.

Q Now, refresh my memory. We talked of this before. Why do you suppose he decided to come to Petaluma?

A I've often thought about that, and I think it was because at that time there was quite a lot of publicity giving the fact you could be an independent farmer, make a living, keep your family in the country and be your own boss, which was the big thing he wanted. He had begun with someone else telling him what to do. A lot of people came into Petaluma at that time from Portugal. And Japanese people, German people, those were all our neighbors.

Q I didn't realize there was also Japanese. I had heard about the Portuguese and German.

A Yes. Not a lot of Japanese. We had Japanese kids in school.

Q Was your dad Irish?

A No. His background was English, north of Europe and Germany.

Q He was born in the United States?

A Yes.

Q So, your mother was the one with the accent?

A She didn't have an accent.

Q Really.

A I don't think so. And she was 18 when she arrived. That's amazing. Now, I have to correct that. Sad as it is, I have little memory of my mother, and I was eight when she died. I don't remember the kind of person she was. I can't remember any personal relationships, except for her combing my hair and putting it in curls. It bothered me because it pulled so I begged to get my hair cut, which I did, like a boy. I was very happy.

Q You were happy? So, every night or every morning she would comb your hair and put it in curls?

A Yes.

Q What kind of curlers did she put them in?

A Around her fingers. I had naturally curly hair.

Q I remember you mentioned that to me before. That's sort of a tragedy you don't have more memory.

A It is to me. The older I get the more it bothers me. Eight is a good sized child. My granddaughter is eight and I would expect her to remember me.

Q Yes, absolutely. My daughter's eight and if I died she would have lots of memories, at least I hope so.

A Maybe I didn't even know she was pregnant, and the many things about that pregnancy, and maybe that withdrew her from me. I remember going with her to the neighbors, through the chicken yard, she liked that. I guess that was the only social life she had. And I remember doing that with her. I don't remember if we ever played together, or if she comforted me. Isn't that awful?



Q It's sad.

A Being Irish, she must have been demonstrative.

Q Yes, I would think so. I can imagine it was hard for her, all those moves. I wonder if she liked living in Petaluma?

A I wonder. You never know. I have often thought that the hills around here are like the Irish countryside. There must have been much about the ranch that seemed like home, because her home had been in the country.

Q She actually died of childbirth?

A I think so. That I don't know.

Q And your sister is how much younger?

A Eight years.

Q And her name again?

A Bessie Blodgett.

Q And you told me she was named after somebody. Who was that?

A She was named after my mother. She was christened Elizabeth, but I always called her Bessie. You know, I was a grown up woman with children of my own when my father died. I never sat down with him and said, "Tell me." It's a reminder that we all need to do that to the people older than we to get the history and the missing pieces, I think.

Q Was she buried here in town?

A Yes.

Q With your dad?

A Yes.

Q And where's he buried?

A Yes, with my dad in the Catholic cemetery.

Q And were you Catholic?

A She was Catholic. It was hard, impossible to get to church.

Q Oh, yes. Because you lived way out. Where did you live?

A Only three miles out, but it was horse and buggy days, and she didn't drive. My dad didn't take that much time to go to church.

Q Where was your father's ranch?

A On Thompson Lane, right in the middle, opposite the mushroom farm.

Q And as far as you remember, is that the very first house, the first place you moved into when you first came to Petaluma?

A Yes.

Q And you lived there until?

A We lived there until, let's see, I was a junior in high school when we moved to town.

Q Tell me a little bit about your dad. He was certainly the adventuresome person.

A Yes, yes. I wish I knew him better. A very silent man, he always said people talked too much. He wasn't one to sit down, or have anyone tell him anything. You would have thought he would have explained to me about my mother. He only said, "Your mother died and you must not



cry." And that was all that was ever said. I went with him to the same neighbor who made some expression of sympathy, and my dad said, "She's better off than we are."

Q It makes you really wonder what was going on in his life.

A All those years he lived as a single man until my sister married. He didn't remarry.

Q He didn't remarry? And how many years was that?

A A lot of years. She was 22.

Q Oh, my goodness.

A He had very little comfort in his life.

Q Do you recall him crying about your mom's death?

A I think he did, because he told me that. He would have choked that back because he didn't want to cry in front of me.

Q Do you remember going to the funeral?

A No, children didn't go to funerals in those days.

Q A real missing link in your past. Then you named Mrs. Kennedy. I'm assuming she came shortly after your mom's death.

A Not too shortly. We had a series of housekeepers. Yo live in the country and take care of this little baby and an eight year old. Nobody stayed too long, until Mrs. Kennedy came and stayed eighteen years.

Q I would imagine it would be hard to find help jut because it was out in the country, very isolated, no transportation.

A It would be a person who was separated from family, no telephone, of course. We didn't depend on such instant communication then. We didn't have a telephone, somebody had one down the lane, a half mile.

Q Did you have neighbors that were fairly close by that you had any contact with? Like kids that you played with?

A No, no children. There was a neighbor where I would go and get milk. Mrs. Kennedy didn't like our well water, so I would go the neighbor's for drinking water.

Q Who did you play with? You were eight years old. You must have been lonely and bored.

A I don't think so. I've never been bored in my life. My dad put up a very big swing. That must have been quite a thing for him to do because he had to bring the wagon and mount a ladder on it. That swing was really my comfort. As I look at it now, it had to be 20 - 30 feet, maybe not, but that's what it seems to me.

Q Was it under an oak tree?

A Yes.

Q And did it have wood seat on it?

A Yes.

Q Did you have pets? Dogs or cats?

A We would always have cats, kept outside. Pets never came in the house. It wasn't that kind of situation.



Q Tell me a little bit about your arrival where when you were 5. Did your father have a chicken farm going at that time?

A He had bought it. How long it had been there, I think not long.

Q What are your early memories of it? What do you remember about it?

A Well, I remember picking peas. I remember chopping kindling wood. I always brought in the wood. That was my job. I remember casing eggs. I remember meal times which were a matter of replenishing your body. Dad would have one cigarette afterward and he would be gone.

Q Not very much live conversation. It sounds like a lot of hard work.

A Yes. It was a matter of being able to. I remember dad build a granary and it had nice clean sacks of wheat. I'd climb up in there and was so much fun. I could imagine all kinds of things. So I took food up there and had myself a little nest. Dad had discovered that and didn't think that was a very good place for me to be.

Q I wonder why he didn't want you up there?

A Probably because it was dangerous. I might slip and fall, and to him that was a little subversive that I would take food out.

Q A little rebellious?

A Yes.

Q So he raised wheat? Or was it grain that he bought?

A Yes, the grain came from town.

Q Wheat, or rye, or barley, or what?

A Barley and wheat, cracked wheat.

Q And was that for you guys to eat, or was it for feed?

A All chicken feed. The trucks would come out, it was always a great day when they brought fresh feed. One time he brought the sweepings of the Nabisco factory.

Q Is that true?

A Yes. There wasn't a lot of it. Maybe a sack or two.

Q That's very interesting, very ingenious that they could get feed from all sources.

A I don't suppose there was very much nourishment in Nabisco scraps. I don't know why dad would have done it.

Q Do you have any idea how many chickens he had?

A About a thousand, I think.

Q And these were chickens for eating and/or laying?

A Just laying. Laying hens. That was the big thing. Do you know what Hoganizing is? Chickens' pelvic bones are a certain distance apart, and if a hen is going to be a big layer, there would be a bigger distance between the bones. A man by the name of Hogan developed this. The idea went like wild fire through the country. Everybody wanted chickens that could lay and lay and lay.

Q So it was depending on the size. That's very interesting. Did you think it was true?

A I think it was a popular idea in the chicken business.



- Q You must have eaten some of the chickens.
- A Oh, yes. Every Sunday; chicken dinner every Sunday. I never got tired of it. I still like chicken. My recollections of chickens from my childhood were that they were very fresh tasting, wonderful tasting, not like what you get now.
- Q Yes, very different. And what kind of chickens were they?
- A White Leghorns. Red combs. They were very pretty in the yard. Dad would feed out in a big circle and the chickens would come to the circle.
- Q I don't know the actual workings of a chicken farm. Did he keep them in the brooding houses?
- A Brooders are where you put the baby chicks.
- Q I see. Okay.
- A You raise them there because they have to have heat. You raise them up to about six weeks. When they are able to fend for themselves. Laying hens are in a big house where they go in or out to suit themselves. In this big chicken house, which had only wire on one side, are the nests, a long row of them. Each hen preferred her own nest in which to lay her eggs.
- Q Who all helped with the gathering of the eggs?
- A Dad did that by himself.
- Q That's an awful lot of work. A thousand chickens? Every day?
- A Yes. I don't ever remember any help on the ranch. We never hired anyone.
- Q No wonder he didn't talk very much. He was probably worn out by the end of the day.
- A He liked to read. He'd read before he went to bed.
- Q Fiction?
- A No. Usually poultry journals, and then he always read reviews of the Saturday Evening Post and Everybody's Magazine.
- Q Did he ever read to you and your sister?
- A No.
- Q What about Mrs. Kennedy?
- A No. I don't think I learned to read until I went to school.
- Q And you went to Wilson School?
- A Yes.
- Q Did they have kindergarten then?
- A I don't think so. We started in first grade. I had such a pretty first grade teacher.
- Q Do you remember who she was?
- A Miss Matthews. She had blond hair. Probably just out of school.
- Q I bet you had small classes, too.
- A Yes, not very many. Perhaps twenty.
- Q Wilson School is out in the country, so I imagine you were going to school with kids of other farmers.
- A Yes, they were all farmer's kids. They came from all directions.



Q I remember you told me one story that I thought was great. I guess you were casing eggs, I'm not sure, did you drop them or shove the broken ones down a knothole?

A Yes. I love that one.

Q You're not the only one who did that. All the people I've interviewed did that.

A Well, it was a boring job, you know. Your hands had to be busy, the eggs had to be cleaned. You use sandpaper. If there were more stains than the sandpaper would take off, then you'd have something else. The idea was not to wet the shell.

Q Why?

A The egg would not keep so well.

Q Oh, I didn't know that. Gee, with sandpaper, I can understand you would break the eggs when you'd rub them.

A I usually broke them if I dropped them. It was boring, and I had to amuse myself. I brought this song book up. I would begin the first page and I would sing all the way through. It's surprising I didn't drop more eggs. It was convenient, knot hole on the floor and wasn't a good idea to waste eggs, I'll tell you. They could have gone in the house for cooking, but then you had to admit you broke it. To this day, I had to admit a mistake. I hate to say I did something wrong. So, anyway, after the odor a little bit bad, I was found out and I was removed from that job.

Q Oh, lucky you. You must have been thrilled.

A No, I was absolutely crushed. Now, dad had to go out after supper and case the eggs. My responsibility had been taken away from me, I hadn't lived up to what was expected of me, and I suffered a lot. I saw him out in the chicken yard a few days later, and I promised never to do that again. So he graciously said I could go back to casing eggs.

Q You were a good daughter. If that was the worst you did, that wasn't very bad.

A If I only had the sense to wait another few hours I'm sure he would have come to me.

Q Yes, I know he needed you.

A Yes, he did. I'm sure he was tired to death. We were very proud of those eggs. He had a letterhead made of Lone Oak Ranch. He even sold to San Francisco firms and the eggs were of such a quality.

Q Explain it to me. He had a letterhead on the box?

A Yes, his business stationary.

Q And what was it called?

A Lone Oak.

Q And where did he sell his eggs?

A At Goldberg and Bowen Company in San Francisco.

Q Explain, what was Goldberg and Bowen?

A They were fancy grocers. They are still in business.



Q Do you remember the price he got for his eggs?  
A No.  
Q And how did the eggs get from Petaluma to Goldberg and Bowen?  
A He took them to the train station.  
Q What were they packed in?  
A They were packed in crates.  
Q But very protective, I would imagine?  
A I mean paper crates, like you get in the store, only it was square. I think it had two dozen layers. One on top of the other in a wooden egg case. There was cardboard between each layer. They had to be handled carefully. At first we had absolutely solid cases, the wood was solid all the way around. They were very heavy, then lighter wooden ones. They went by train to Sausalito and across the ferry to San Francisco, and I don't know how they got to the retailer.  
Q I just wonder how many eggs broke in passage?  
A I don't know.  
Q Probably not many or you would have heard complaints about that.  
A Yes. As we said, those cases had to be carefully handled, and I guess they were. It was a time when people weren't conservation minded, in any case they would take time.  
Q I think you also talked to me about vaccinating the chickens. Tell me a little bit about that. What they were vaccinated against and how?  
A They were vaccinated against something called carisa, which is another word for cold really. You'd get up early in the morning, that way the chickens were locked into their house, then they would be shooed out of the chicken houses into chicken coops. Do you know what a chicken coop is?  
Q No, tell me. I think I know.  
A It's about this high and about as long as this rug, and a sliding door on the top. So they were shooed out into that, and they were then taken out one by one, and vaccinated and turned loose. It was a long proposition.  
Q It would take days, I would imagine, to do it.  
A Well, we only did it early in the morning, before I went to school.  
Q So you helped out with that?  
A Oh, yes. It would take several mornings to go through a house.  
Q So you would be working with your dad then? You'd be holding the chickens and he'd be vaccinating them?  
A That's right. I worked also at planting kale. That was another thing the kids did. That was tiresome too.  
Q I bet it was. And you did that before school in the morning?  
A Oh, yes. That's when I was available.  
Q So you probably got up very early?  
A Yes. Five o'clock. Of course, he had to get up at five o'clock too. He also had the benefit of my stooping.  
Q Benefit of what?



A Of the fact that I could stoop. It was very methodical. A cord was stretched, you planted by the cord, and then you moved the cord another two, three feet. The soil was sandy loam. With one stroke, dad would make a slit in the ground with his spade; I would drop in the young plant; the spade was pulled out, the soil pressed down by dad's foot and we moved about three feet along the cord for the next plant.

Q And did your family ever eat kale? Or did you just keep it exclusively?

A No.

Q I love kale. It's one of my favorite greens. It's quite good. But everyone I talk to who had a chicken farm never ate it. It was just for the chickens.

A It was ground up, it was cup up fine, and sometimes put in their mash. Sometimes the leaves were thrown into the yards. There was waste there because the hens wouldn't eat the stems, for example. Just the greens. And another thing I remember now that I might not have told you. The chickens were watered in wooden troughs, to which was attached a float which would turn on water so that there was always water there. So, of course, the water stood and was subject to algae. And dad put potassium permanganate in the water to keep the water fresh. It was kind of a pink stuff. I was always impressed with that.

Q Drop form or bottle?

A Poured it out of a bottle.

Q Is that some kind of preservative that would prevent the algae from growing?

A Yes.

Q I wonder how often he had to do that?

A I really can't tell you.

Q I don't think I've ever heard anyone mention that before. Yes, I wondered about that. Because that is a very good point. Water begins to get stagnant and begins to have algae and bacteria. I guess I assumed that everyone else had to dump it out and wash it periodically.

A Yes, the troughs were scrubbed periodically. There was a special stiff brush for that.

Q Your dad at that point in time must have been in his 40s? And he had only really been a pharmacist. He had gotten his degree in pharmacy, so he had been a pharmacist for a while in Butte, Montana.

A Yes.

Q That's a curious thing about him. It makes me curious what motivated him.

A Yes. He was a man of much determination and enough education to realize he could find out how to run a chicken ranch. He read a lot, and I think he was successful as anyone. He paid the mortgage off on the ranch.

Q And he was brave. It takes a certain amount of bravery to do something you don't know anything about in a place you don't know.



A Yes. He couldn't have had too much money or he would not have had to mortgage the place to buy it.

Q Yes, that's right.

A But, of course, everything that we needed for the table was raised on the place.

Q Did he have cows?

A A cow that didn't last long.

Q So you got milk from the neighbor's?

A Yes.

Q And you had a vegetable garden?

A Oh, yes.

Q And fruit?

A Yes, lots of fruit trees.

Q Yes, I know. Very self-sufficient. What did you not like about it?

A I? It's hard to answer. I only know that I loved school. I was just happy to be in school.

Q Now, about Mrs. Kennedy. I remember you saying you weren't too fond of her. Isn't it awful to have to have someone you don't like stay with your family for eighteen year? That must have been a thorn in your side?

A And my dad's side too.

Q Yes, right.

A I don't know how he survived. I really don't.

Q So he didn't like her very much either?

A Well, they had nothing in common. She was a woman who hated educated people. Also, if they were Catholic they were out. She was very bigoted and narrow minded. But she could sure cook.

Q Like what did she cook?

A Oh, good desserts.

Q At least she had one redeeming quality.

A Yes. She made cookies, she made donuts, she made tapioca, the big round kind on the back of the stove. It was so good with cinnamon and apples and sugar. Pies she could make, good pies and bread. We always had dessert, and that's very important to me, even to this day.

Q Well, also, like I say, she had some redeeming qualities.

A Oh, yes. She had many redeeming qualities. She was a good housekeeper. She was honest. And as I say, she was a good cook and she did love Bessie.

Q Yes. I was wondering how Bessie got along with her.

A Of course, Bessie was a baby and Mrs. Kennedy loved babies.

Q Do you ever recall her going into town? Did she have a day off. I guess not. I mean, housekeepers were supposed to put in 24-hour days.

A I suppose she must have gone to town once or twice. But I remember dad doing all the shopping. When I needed a new dress he brought the material home.



- Q And she would sew?
- A Oh, she was a good seamstress. That's another thing she could do. She sewed nice underpants and petticoats with lots of tucks.
- Q Underpants that they don't have now days. Did she teach you to sew? Cook? Things like that?
- A She tried to teach me to sew by making a quilt with 2-inch squares.
- Q Yes, you mentioned that.
- A Did I say that?
- Q Yes, just tiny, tiny square. Tedious.
- A Yes, tedious. She tried to teach me to crochet and I was unable to learn that until I went to school and somebody showed me how to make hairpin lace on a spool.
- Q I guess then they didn't have home economics?
- A Not in grammar school.
- Q Did your school go to eighth grade or to ninth grade?
- A Eighth grade.
- Q And then you went to?
- A High school. Petaluma High. We went for a while by taxi, and a while by neighbors. And sometimes we walked.
- Q You sometimes used a taxi?
- A Yes. The neighbors got together and four or five of us were taken by taxi.
- Q Who were some of the other kids that you rode with?
- A Bill Romwall and his sister Ruth, Don and Jean Cameron.
- Q That was for high school. How did you get to Wilson School? Did you walk?
- A Yes, the school was not far, three quarters of a mile.
- Q And for high school. You didn't go right from grammar school?
- A When I graduated in June, or whenever, there didn't seem to be any way to get into high school. So I went back to grammar school and my teacher liked me, helped me with high school subjects for that semester. After Christmas dad said I should get to high school. I don't remember being very upset about it because I was so happy with this teacher. I liked her and wanted to imitate her.
- Q Now, who was she? Do you remember her?
- A Her name was Estelle Unger. She was a stupendous teacher. And later they moved her to administrative work in town -- a loss to the children.
- Q It also probably was really important to you, you know, a young girl without a mom, living with Mrs. Kennedy who you weren't close to, to have someone you could admire and model after. It's nice it was somebody as nice as she was.
- A At Wilson School older kids could sweep the classrooms for four dollars a month. It was a coveted task, you were really in if you could get that job. Our desks were on two by four runners, so there were aisles between that you had to get under the desks with the broom, which was



kind of a pain, and I'll bet I wasn't very good at. And then you had to go up to the toilet, which was at the back boundary of the yard, and swish that out, and you did this after school. And it paid four dollars a month. The biggest money I ever made in my life.

Q What grade were you then?

A It must have been sixth or seventh grade.

Q How long did you do that?

A I don't remember how long I did it. Maybe not long. Maybe I wasn't good enough.

Q Was the first money you'd ever gotten, I wonder?

A The first I ever earned. The first gift I had was a five dollar gold piece from my mother's brother.

Q And who was he? What was his name?

A Steve Parker.

Q He gave you a five dollar gold piece?

A Yes.

Q When did he visit? How old were you?

A I think he came to my mother's funeral.

Q And he was the only brother that came?

A Yes, he was the only brother that came. A cousin came also.

Q It's too bad we don't have more memories. I wonder how your mother liked living on a chicken farm?

A I wonder.

Q I wonder if she ever had helped? She had one leg. Did she have a wooden leg?

A She had what was called a "limb," which is what we call prosthesis now. But it was never fitted. It came mail order, and so she used a crutch most of the time. So getting outside on soft ground at that time must have been very hard.

Q Was her leg amputated at the hip or beneath?

A Above the knee.

Q And do you know why?

A A relative told me years later it was an accident connected with horseback riding. After she came to this country.

Q But you don't know the details?

A No.

Q She must have been very isolated, and probably pretty much confined to the house.

A I wonder if she wasn't pretty depressed.

Q That's what I wonder too. She might have been pretty sad. And that might be part of the reason why you don't remember. Sometimes people who are depressed are withdrawn, so there's not much to remember.

A I think prior to that time she had been very vivacious, because the same relative told me that she had had all kinds of beaux.

Q Prior to the accident?



- A No, not necessarily.
- Q Prior to moving?
- A Prior to marriage.
- Q Did your dad know her before she had her leg amputated?
- A No, he met her afterwards. It must have been a real love match.
- Q Yes, it must have been.
- A That shows another side of his character too.
- Q For someone so adventuresome as he was, to always have to accommodate her.
- A I think so. My sister married a man without one arm, and he died and she is presently very much in love with another man with one arm.
- Q You know, that's very spooky, there's some karma in your family about that.
- A My husband's brother also lost a leg, just in the last year. I don't know what karma is, but whatever it is we have it.
- Q Karma is ... maybe that's why you liked Wallace Stagler so much.
- A He always has a character that crippled in one way or another.
- Q Very interesting. I think of another question. Do you know anything about a Galline Club? Spanish for hen is galline. It was some kind of a social, professional club for people who raised chickens. And I guess it was here in Petaluma. Maxine asked me to ask you about it, to see if you knew anything about it. Apparently somebody had mentioned it.
- A Bert Praetzel might know something about it. But my dad was not involved in any case, but Bert might know.
- Q Was your dad a member of a church or anything?
- A He said he always called himself a Jack Episcopalian. I think it means he was baptized and that's it. But my dad was a very unbigoted person. I didn't know there were Jewish people until after I had left high school. And the Japanese, they were Japanese, that's all. I never felt any different between nationalities.
- Q A nice quality then. So on Sundays he didn't take you kids into town, or picnics?
- A Well, after we got a car, then we would go for Sunday drives. We would have picnics with all this fried chicken, in this special box that just fit under the seat.
- Q And did Mrs. Kennedy go along?
- A Yes, she went alone.
- Q Your upbringing is so different from Bertha Praetzel. She described these huge family picnics every weekend, and this big, warm family. And the contrast is really interesting.
- A Amazing, isn't it?
- Q Yes, it is. I don't know if she lived close to you?
- A Oh, yes. She lived just across from Wilson School and her siblings all went to the Catholic school, but her father was trustee for Wilson School. Once, her father was building a fence along our lane as I came



home from school, and at times he would stop and talk. And I would say, "Oh, are you going to take the fence past our place?" And he would say, "I sure am," and so I reported this to dad that we were to have a new fence. Dad said, "Well, if he does that I'll buy you a pony."

Q Did you get your pony?

A Need you ask? But Johnny King was a very social man.

Q Yes, it sounds like it.

A He was Portuguese. His wife was Irish. So it was a wonderful combination. And as you say, it was a big family, both of them had a lot of relatives on all sides.

Q I thought of that as I interviewed her, how different that sounded from yours. Because it was really just you and your sister. That brings up another question. How close were you?

A Not very.

Q Well, you were far apart in age. Eight years.

A Yes. And I remember seeing her playing in her sandbox in the kitchen. She spent hours in that sandbox. But she didn't have much impact on my life. And I remember seeing her playing with the little dog. I didn't really think of her as a person until I went to college and realized she was in high school, and maybe there were some things she ought to know. I was careful to impart this. I'm not sure it was very helpful. After that time, then I began to feel responsible for her. After my marriage she came and visited me, and we would sew together. Then after we both had children we were very close.

Q And what about now?

A We're very close.

Q Where does she live?

A She lives in Santa Cruz. We don't see very much of each other, because I can't drive that far.

Q She also might have been as close to you because she was so bonded to Mrs. Kennedy.

A Yes. Yes, and Mrs. Kennedy had a tendency to set us against each other.

Q Yes. That doesn't surprise me. She probably really thought of Bessie as her child.

A Oh, yes. Another thing about our father. His sister wrote that she would raise one of us. But his reply was that he wanted to keep us together.

Q Just another facet of his character. I'm sure that was much better for you, in spite of Mrs. Kennedy, and everything, it was still better for you.

A Oh, yes. I probably would have never had a sister.

Q That's right.

A That was East Coast. You didn't fly back and forth in those days.

Q How did your dad get into the chicken pharmacy?



A Here in town?

Q Yes.

A The mortgage on the ranch was paid for, paid off, and I think he was bored. Maybe he was tired of cleaning chicken houses. Did you ever clean a chicken house?

Q I can imagine.

A It's no fun. Or an outdoor toilet. That's no fun either. Privy it's called there.

Q How do you clean an outdoor toilet?

A Well, for one thing you put lime in it frequently. On occasion you have to have several good drinks, and then you empty it. Aren't you glad you asked?

Q I'm glad we have flush toilets.

A And the Sears catalog was out there. Well, anyway, and then I was in high school and I was looking at the boys and you know, it was time to come to town. And he had a very, very good friend in the drug business. So he worked for Joe Tuttle.

Q As a pharmacist?

A As a pharmacist. But now by this time pharmacies had changed. There were more cosmetics sold, and he wasn't compounding any medicine or fixing any real prescriptions, you know, the way he had been taught. So that bored him. He was a very attractive man. He was not tall, had nice features, and nice white hair, fair skin. So by the time he went out of the chicken business, pollution had begun to come in, so that there was considerably more diseases among the chickens and more need for capsules and more need for different kinds of vaccinations, and all that kind of thing. Not only here, but in chicken localities throughout the state it was the same. He did a lot of mail order business.

Q Was the pollution from the chickens themselves, or chemicals?

A Yes, passing around from farm to farm, getting that many more chickens in the area. And how the idea came to him, I don't know. Whether he just woke up one morning and thought that was what he'd do. I don't remember he ever discussed it with me or anybody. Her certainly wouldn't ask my opinion, that's for sure. He just became a chicken pharmacist.

Q What year was that, do you remember?

A I would have been in high school. So it would be before 1918, 1919, 1920, something like that.

Q And where was the original site?

A You know where the Good-Will store is now?

Q Yes.

A On the boulevard, it was down about two stores.

Q He was selling all kinds of medication for a variety of chicken problems?

A In mail order to other.



- Q What were some of the other chicken locations in the state? I don't know that.
- A Places in California, nothing that sticks in my mind.
- Q He sold the farm, he moved into town. Where did he move to in town?
- A He lived in two different houses. One right near the Catholic church. The house we lived in the longest was the one on Bassett Street. On the corner of Bassett and Upham Streets. At that time the Washington Grammar School was on Upham Street. He bought that house, because he knew he was going to retire some day and he thought he would enjoy being that close to the kids; watching the kids would be entertaining.
- Q Now, that's another interesting point about him. Interesting.
- A He could watch the kids at a distance.
- Q How long did he keep the pharmacy? Until he retired?
- A He took a partner and they ran the store together.
- Q Who was his partner?
- A His name was Davis. Dr. Dave Davis, a veterinarian.
- Q Did his partner just take it over when your dad retired?
- A Yes. He sold out to him.
- Q Didn't you tell me that the chicken pharmacy still operates today under another name?
- A It's now near Magnolia on Petaluma Boulevard North. Do you know where the T.V. place is?
- Q Yes.
- A Well, it's in that series of buildings. The last one on the left. I forget what it's called.
- Q Yes. I tried driving by. I need to look more closely to see if I can find it. I imagine those people are fairly new owners too.
- A Well, I think they bought from Dr. Davis.
- Q I see. Okay. Now, tell me again, I remember before how you met your husband, how your relationship developed, and getting married. If you could talk about that again.
- A Well, we were in high school in the same class. And he was tall and good looking and had such curly hair, and was shy, and I just decided I really liked his looks. And he was a Methodist, and the Methodist church was right around the corner from our first town house. So it seemed natural for me to attend that church.
- Q And here was this good looking, curly haired boy.
- A Yes, you bet. And he was ambitious, and I knew he was ambitious. Everything about him appealed to me. So it was just one of those high school romances that didn't dissolve. I went away to college, and he went to school, and then after we married he went to medical school.
- Q Where did he go to medical school?
- A Los Angeles.
- Q Where did you go to college?
- A Berkeley.



Q And did you graduate?

A No. At the end of my third year I left college to get married.

Q And you got married here in Petaluma?

A Yes.

Q At the Methodist church?

A Oh, yes.

Q And when did you move back to Petaluma? I imagine after he got out of medical school?

A Yes, when he had his degree. He moved here to practice. Our house is built of the Methodist bricks from the old Methodist church.

Q And you had three children? Two of whom are still alive?

A Yes.

Q Your two daughters are still alive. And they live where?

A One lives in Los Angeles and one lives in New York.

Q Any doctors among them?

A The older girl is a Ph.D., not a doctor who can do anything for you my husband used to say. She is an Art Historian and a college professor in New York. She has one son.

Q Well, let me think. What else about your life?

A Are you satisfied?

Q I have a few more questions. Just two final questions. What is the thing that you are most proud of?

A Well, I've always been terribly fortunate. I've always had a lot of luck. Things that happened turned out for the better. Life in its entirety has been so good to me. I'm proud that my daughters have been successful, and are good people. I think that's when you know what you've done, when you see your daughters and their children.

Q I hope that I have that chance to do that.

Q Usually, when there's a doctor in the family they usually produce more doctors.

A Yes, you have to hand it to Dr. Leoni. I think he had eight or ten children. I know which, and every one of them has gone into some phase of medicine.

Q I didn't realize that.

A Do you know Dr. Leoni?

Q I know who he is. I actually know one of his daughters-in-law. I didn't realize that every one of them. Well, that happens in doctors' families. You would have thought one maybe.

A Dr. Leoni himself was raised in the St. Vincent's orphanage.

Q Isn't that interesting.

A Do you know where it is?

Q No, I don't even know where it is. You mean the one down in Marin County?

A Yes.



- Q Boy, that's a success story. That he could come from that kind of a background and become so successful.
- A A nice man too. And the nicest wife. All these kids and she looks younger than anybody. I would see her in the grocery store with her cart piled high with groceries. I don't think I could handle it.
- Q Well, let me think. What else about your life?
- A Are you about satisfied?
- Q I have a few more questions. Just two final questions. What is the thing that you are most proud of?
- A Well, I've always been terribly fortunate. I've always had a lot of luck. Things that happened turned out for the better. Life in its entirety has been so good to me. I'm proud that my daughters have been successful, and are good people. I think that's when you know what you've done, when you see your daughters and their children.
- Q I hope that I have that chance to do that.
- A I felt it so keenly when one little girl lost her leg. My daughter really came through.
- Q Was this just recently?
- A She was seven years old. It was a hard year for all of us. She did fine.
- Q It sounds like, obviously, she's 12 now, she's coping with it.
- A Yes. Fortunately, her parents were able to give her everything in the way of psychiatric care. And the prothesis had to be changed every three months at six thousand dollars each time. She has to have it continuously checked, and her life is very different from other children.
- Q Her life probably revolves around it.
- A A lot. But she'll be fine.
- Q You've had a lot of tragedy in your life, haven't you?
- A Yes.
- Q Your son and your mother. That's enough. Your husband. How long have you been a widow?
- A Since '74.
- Q What do you think is the worst thing in your life? If you could have rewritten your life, what would you have written out?
- A I think I would have kept my mother. I might have been different, the kind of person I turned out to be. My husband often said, "You know, Anna, you lost your mother but that made a real person out of you."
- Q He was obviously very much in love with you.



Anna Keyes Neilsen  
in conversation with Maxine Durney, Petaluma April 1991

"When we moved to Petaluma, to 200 Bassett street, I was in high school. My father was working for Joe Tuttle, in his drugstore. My first job was to pay the bills for Mrs. Zartman, a handsome woman, I remember. I think it was an iron works, on Howard street. Mrs. Zartman gave me a bag of money, or signed blank checks, and I went all over Petaluma, paying her bills.

"My father was concerned about me, a girl with ideas, and wanted me to be employed after school. I went to work for George Ott. I was happy with it, but it wasn't until I was thirty five years old that I learned that my father had said to Mr. Ott, "If you'll hire her, Ill pay her wages.

"My father had been taught to compound medicines. Drug stores werre changing, druggists were no longer compounding medicines, were merely retailing medicines. Yes, he must have talked to poultrymen when they came in to buy potassium to clean their water troughs of algae. Where he got the idea to establish a chicken pharmacy, I don't know.

"I went to work for him there, but the work was spotty. There was endless filling of capsules, which we purchased empty, and which we filled with compounds he had devised. No, I didn't work at the counter. There the poultrymen weere asking for diagnoses. My father had the point of view of a pharmacist, and he subscribed to the professional magazines for poultrymen. He was a great reader, and had a lot of gumption. In the beginning there was less disease, chickens were free in the yards, and there weren't so many of them.

"I went about town to pay his bills, too, carrying blank checks he had signed. One time I added a paring knife at Rex Hardware, and this upset my father's bookkeeper. I wasn't asked to pay the bills again.

"One Christmas time I was in Los Angeles. I went out to a poultry farm and searched out the handsomest bird I could find. I took it to a taxidermist, had it stuffed, and brought it home as a Christmas gift for my Dad. He was very pleased, and had it there in the pharmacy. I didn't think I would get it home: we travelled the "Grapevine" out of Los Angeles, in a Model T, in snow. I remember the bird travelling in the back seat, and wondered if I'd get it home to my Dad."



PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
Oral History Program

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PLACE PETALUMA

DATE MAY — 1998

Anna Keyes Neilsen  
(Interviewee)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)



PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
Oral History Program  
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Neilsen Anna A Keyes  
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 510 Dana St  
Petaluma

Marital status: Married \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed X

Birthdate 2/26/03 Birthplace Butte Montana

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 81 years

Education: Elementary school Wilson District

Secondary school Petaluma High Grad '20

College U.C. Berkeley Grad EX '24

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) Sec'y LA Dept. of Education  
Receptionist - Book Keeper in husband's medical office.

Travels Israel (4 times) New Zealand, Europe (3 times), Alaska,  
Canadian Rockies, Southwest U.S., East coast U.S.

Organizations, clubs United Methodist Church, Pet. Historical Society  
Friends of Library

Other special interests COTS, Hospice, Adult Literacy League  
S.R. Symphony, Cinnabar Arts Corp, Fish; United Methodist Church  
Pet. Educational Fndtn, Pet. Peoples' Service, Hospital Chaplaincy Service

Additional comments \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU!



PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
Oral History Program  
Family History Questionnaire

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Birthdate</u>	<u>Birthplace</u>	<u>Deceased? Date</u>
<u>Parents*</u>	Jas E Keyes	1870	N.Y	1935
	Bessie Parker	1878	Athlone Ireland	1910
<u>Brothers &amp; Sisters</u>	Elizabeth Blodgett	1910	Petaluma	—
<u>Grand-parents*</u>	Elihue Keyes	—	—	Deceased
	Laura Monfort	—	—	"
<u>Spouse</u>	Melvin L. Neilsen M.D	1902	Livermore	1974
<u>Children</u>	James Melvin Neilsen	1930	Petaluma	1942
	Shirley Neilsen Blum	1932	"	—
	Gloria Neilsen Salick	1943	"	—
<u>Grandchildren</u>	Jason Blum	1969	Los Angeles	—
	Gabriella Salick	1974	"	—
	Elizabeth Salick	1976	"	—
	Anna-Martine Salick	1980	"	—

\*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!



## Anna Keyes Neilsen

*Charlotte Kaehler. Gifts of age; portraits  
and essays of thirty-two remarkable  
women. Chronical Books 1985*

Born February 26, 1903

*The enthusiasm of a beautiful woman can be a great spur to a man's work, and for most of her life, Anna Neilsen provided that support for her husband. Just after college, at the University of California at Berkeley, she married a small-town doctor in Petaluma and for many years was his office assistant. They had two daughters, and Anna has four grandchildren. When her husband's health forced his retirement, she nursed him for five years before his death.*

*Since becoming a widow in her early seventies, Anna has discovered in herself an extraordinary range of interests. Her lifelong friend Kay Seidell said, "There're lots of things to do, Anna," and she told her where to buy a good piece of luggage with wheels. Anna has traveled with it thousands of miles. She continues to take part in many of the volunteer activities identified in her generation with the wives of professionals—providing food and distributing clothing for those in need and visiting some of her husband's former patients, who are now in nursing homes. She also does typing and sewing for the local Cinnabar Theater. However, she says that*

*she arranges her life now so that no one will become too dependent upon her—the soup kitchen won't go under if she isn't there. She is free for the many journeys she wants to make.*

*Although she travels a great deal, many of her journeys are of the mind. She meets regularly with fifteen to twenty older women (see Kay Morris Seidell in this volume for a more complete description of the group) who study a broad range of subjects, including archaeology, painting, and philosophy. She and her older sister, Bess, live in different towns, but they occasionally meet to enjoy an Elderhostel, the summer educational program for people over sixty that has more than 80,000 participants throughout the world. Recently she has studied women's self-defence and done gliding and ballooning; the latter, she says, is the less exciting of the two.*

*The story she told about river rafting with her grandson says a lot about the caring family's delicate balance; responsibility toward elders may interfere with their freedom. Anna's blend of affection, candor, and assertiveness helps her maintain the independence she needs.*



## PRECIOUS DAYS

When Anna came in from the theater, the flyer from Oars had arrived in the mail, and she called outside to Jason to tell him about it. This summer she wanted to take him on another rafting trip, just the two of them. He would be fifteen, and she eighty-two. Maybe this would be the last year he'd want to do a thing like that with his grandmother.

He grinned at her from the backyard. His teeth were looking beautiful now that his braces were off, and he'd grown another four inches since she'd seen him last. She was happy that her house, with all the trees in the back, was pleasant for him to visit. He seemed to love getting away from New York for his winter vacation.

"How about the Middle Fork of the American this year, Jason?" she asked. "Around mid-August looks like a good trip."

She'd be back then from the Elderhostel she and her sister were planning. That would be good for Bess, who was doing a lot of drawing these days. One of the courses was Sketching Your Journey. She herself felt like an inept kindergartner in such a class, but the other course, on modern poetry, was appealing. She enjoyed the people who went to the Elderhostels; they were from all kinds of backgrounds, strong individuals who were still open to new ideas. The one she went to last year at the Shakespeare festival had renewed her passion for the theater, and she'd plunged into local work backstage.

Jason handed back the rafting schedule. "Sounds okay." He was far from enthusiastic. Maybe the time when he felt like going somewhere with Nana had already come and gone. Maybe he had learned that her feet were made of clay. She had to be sensitive to that. Even as a child, Anna had felt determined she would never become a crabby, disagreeable old person, as the elders around her had been. She didn't have a lot of time with her family; it was pretty farflung for frequent visits, with Jason and Shirley in New York and Gloria in Los Angeles. But they had always enjoyed being together. So far she hadn't experienced any "old lady aversion." Jason had never shown the least reluctance to be around her until now—if that is what his attitude meant.

"What's wrong, Jason? Rafting lost its appeal?"

"No, no. It'll be swell." Then he asked if she weren't going to be busy working for the little theater this summer. Jason knew better. She wouldn't even take roles with the company because she didn't want to make extended commitments of her time now that it was all hers and not her husband's or her family's. She limited herself to being theater flunky. She'd told Jason her attitude before. Something was definitely wrong.

They had become white-water rafting enthusiasts eight years ago, when Shirley called to invite her to join her and Jason in Utah for a trip down the Colorado. She immediately said yes. When Shirley told it later to her friends, she put in a pause in which the listener was supposed to imagine Anna's thinking: At my age? Seventy-four at the time. But everybody adds a touch of fiction to a story. The truth was, Anna didn't hesitate a moment.

From Utah they flew by small plane down into the Grand Canyon, and for three days and nights they were taken completely out of their own lives. At night they lay looking up at the colored tiers of the earth's history, united to the universe of stars and filled with a sense of peace and mystery. By day the excitement, especially on the rapids, took all bounds out of existence. She loved the movement of the earth speeding past them, the sensation of the water drenching her face and hair. Later when friends asked, "Weren't you afraid of the white water?" She answered, "Yes, that's why you go. For



those moments that is all there is to life, just hanging on and feeling it."

On that first trip the raft was enormous: it held all thirty-two people in the party, and there were moments when it seemed to lift straight up into the air. Jason was still small enough to cling to her and to his mother, shrieking with delight. The pleasure children take in being afraid—rafting restored that forgotten joy to her life.

Last summer, when they went together to ride the North Fork of the American River, just the two of them, the rapids weren't nearly as high. The party was broken up into four rubber rafts, which young women were paddling quite competently. Yet there was plenty of white water; they were all wet to the skin most of the time, their tennis shoes soaked. Jason often sat straddling the ballooning side of the rubber raft, and whenever it got rough, he slid down beside her, held onto her. It wasn't as rigorous a trip as the Colorado, they had agreed, but still those were a few precious days she wouldn't forget.

Maybe Jason felt differently, thought it hadn't been exciting enough? At night they had slept outdoors in their sleeping bags. On the second morning Jason expressed the worry that had kept both of them from drifting immediately to sleep: "What if a bear had come?"—almost as if he wanted a scare. Maybe the water was just too tame after the Colorado.

She put it to him. They had no secrets from one another. If he wanted to go on some other river, she wanted to know. And if he felt he was too old to go with her, she wanted to know that too.

"Oh, Nana, it's just that—well, Aunt Gloria was just as bad as Mom about things last year." Gloria—what did she have to do with it? Jason was looking down at his large feet.

Finally she dug it out of him. Both his mother and his aunt had made him promise to look after her whenever the water got rough. She remembered that he'd always come to grasp her hand during the rapids, but she hadn't imagined it was on his mother's and aunt's instructions. Those two girls! "Jason, that's ridiculous. It must have spoiled the trip for you."

"I didn't want to tell you because they were just worried about you, that's all."

It wasn't fair to put that kind of pressure on a child when he was supposed to be enjoying himself. And she knew Jason, a child who took his responsibilities seriously.

"Don't say anything to them about it," Jason pleaded. He could see how annoyed she was. And now he was taking more responsibility, asking her not to reproach them. What was the answer? She had to make sure she had the whole story, that the boy would otherwise enjoy the trip with her.

She had worried about old age since she was a child, never having seen anybody aging gracefully. At twenty-one she had decided that chess would keep her mind alert and had learned the game for her old age. She had also studied braille, though she didn't know if she would remember it now. She was determined never to dampen the spirits of anybody younger than she. Maybe she spread herself thin, but it was better than becoming a bore.

What Jason said next told her what she needed to know. "Nana, I'll just come out here and stay with you a while, how about that? We can play chess. I'm getting better at it."

"Jason, let's make a pact," she said. "I want to go rafting. I think you do too. Let's tell Oars we want them to put us on separate rafts. We can trade notes at night, and bunk together to protect each other from bears. How does that sound?"

"Gosh, Nana, I don't know . . ."

"Just one condition. We won't tell your mother or Aunt Gloria about our pact."

He hesitated a moment, then his grin sealed their conspiracy.



## PRECIOUS DAYS





## Annual Receipts of Eggs, Poultry and Butter

### Receipts of Eggs by States at San Francisco During 1924

California .....	737,229	cases
Oregon .....	10,336	"
Washington .....	6,278	"
Nevada .....	18	"
Idaho .....	2,736	"
Colorado .....	850	"
Montana .....	943	"
Kansas .....	1,253	"
Nebraska .....	400	"
Total .....	760,043	"
1923 .....	854,989	"
1922 .....	837,930	"

### Receipts of Dressed Poultry by States at San Francisco During 1924

California .....	4,178,402	pounds
Oregon .....	413,546	"
Washington .....	338,955	"
Nevada .....	249,652	"
Idaho .....	336,286	"
Kansas .....	458,761	"
Nebraska .....	54,316	"
Iowa .....	72,556	"
Illinois .....	164,284	"
Texas .....	24,016	"
Montana .....	113,388	"
Oklahoma .....	24,076	"
Minnesota .....	24,255	"
Total .....	6,452,583	"
1923 .....	5,912,903	"
1922 .....	4,965,548	"

### Receipts of Butter by States at San Francisco During 1924

California .....	22,983,958	pounds
Oregon .....	947,670	"
Washington .....	605,878	"
Nevada .....	258,592	"
Idaho .....	490,155	"
Montana .....	700,532	"
Utah .....	157,857	"
Colorado .....	20,921	"
Minnesota .....	171,676	"
Wisconsin .....	925	"
Nebraska .....	46,884	"
Illinois .....	1,093	"
Arizona .....	700	"
Wyoming .....	23,779	"
Total .....	26,410,620	"
1923 .....	25,510,622	"
1922 .....	25,916,260	"



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RADIO SPRAY for COLDS, ROUP and CHICKEN POX is sprayed over the fowls when roosting. ¶ When experienced poultrymen recommend Radio Spray as the best remedy for colds and roup they have ever used, it makes one sit up and take notice.

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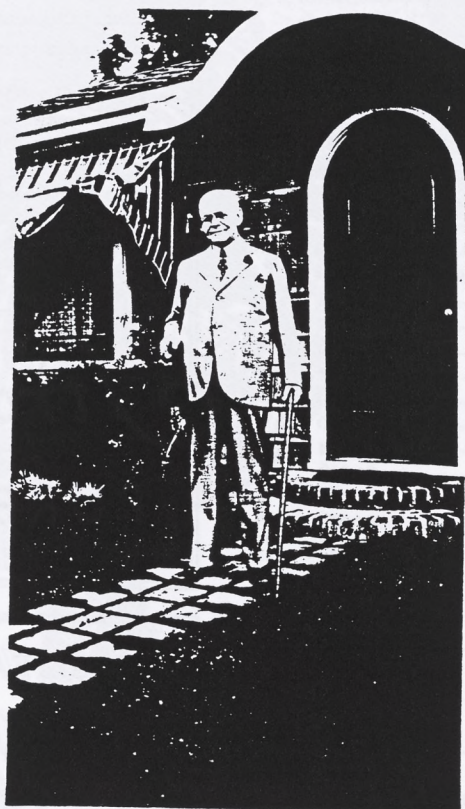
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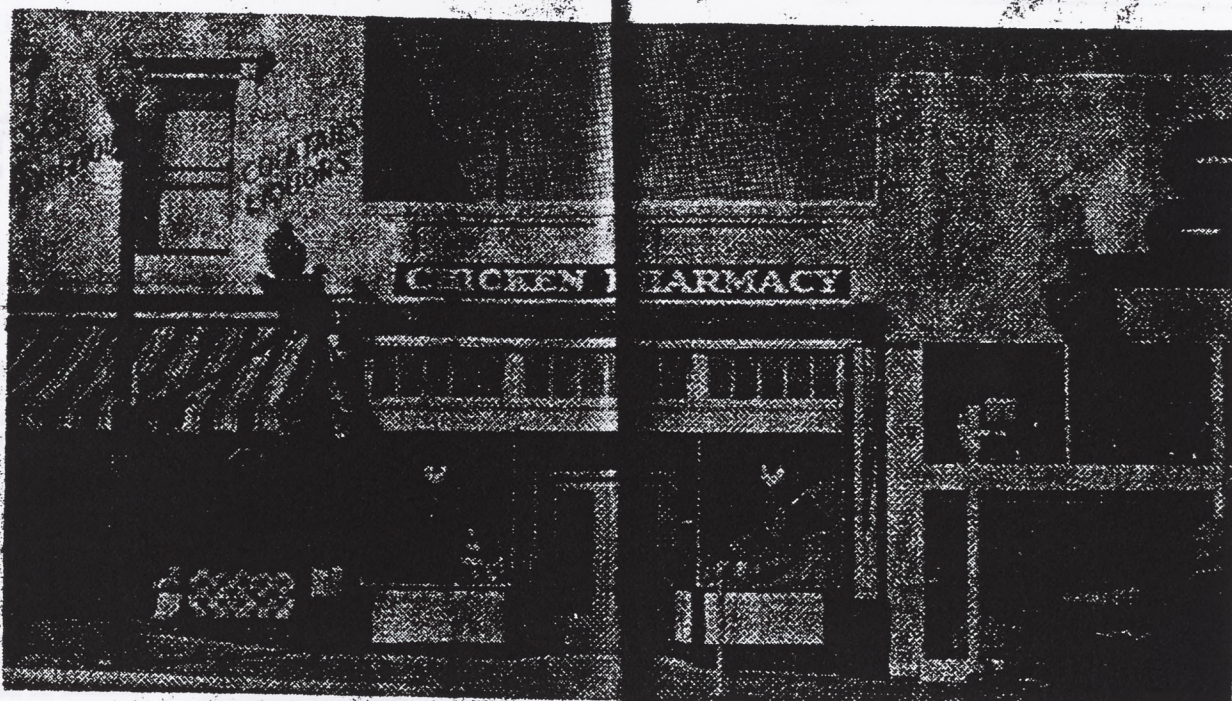
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James E Keyes  
April 1935





Petaluma's Chicken Pharmacy was no laughing matter

ED MANNION COLLECTION

## GAYE LeBARON'S NOTEBOOK



### When Petaluma was definitely a 'chicken outfit'

**T**ake a close look at the colored eggs that are everywhere today. In years gone by, with all due respect to the Easter Bunny, it would have been almost a sure thing that those eggs were laid by hens who worked in or near Petaluma. But, no more.

The closing of the last hatchery in Petaluma can be considered a significant historical event. And such events always set the memories to boiling. When H&N Hatchery shut its doors last week, it started people talking about chickens again. And about the days when Petaluma was "The Egg Basket of the World."

Truth is, the "Egg Basket" days ended long ago — or, perhaps I should say, they have been ending since the 1950s. After World War II, Sonoma County chicken ranchers, like the hop ranchers, were victims of a national move to risk capital or corporate agriculture. The small chicken farms that dotted the Petaluma Valley, with their 4,000 or 5,000 "range" chickens or laying hens in long, low redwood chicken houses, were made obsolete by new technology and increased



Petalumans knew how tenuous the chicken business was and how a whole flock could fall prey to fowl cholera or respiratory viruses. They took the Chicken Pharmacy very seriously. But the rest of the world regarded it as a curiosity. Robert Ripley, a Santa Rosa lad who had become internationally known for his "Believe It or Not!" cartoons, drew upon the Chicken Pharmacy for material, in fact, included motion pictures of it in his "Believe It or Not" spots in movie news. Millions of people in theaters

over America giggled at the notion of a drug store for chickens.

In 1933 Dr. Davis purchased pharmacist Keyes' interest in the business, but Keyes stayed on as dispensing druggist, followed by Watson McFadden. In 1952, Davis changed the name of the business to Davis Poultry Clinic. In 1954, he sold it to his associate, Dr. William Dungan.

**DR. DUNGAN**, considered one of the foremost poultry pathologists in the country, also came to work in the state lab. He had come to Petaluma following World War II after hearing of the poultry research work being done there. Together, he and Dr. Davis made a formidable team of disease fighters.

Interviewed at his hilltop home in west Petaluma last week, Dr. Dungan, now retired, talked about the Chicken Pharmacy's transition from the medications of druggist Keyes (his trademark Kill-Well worm "expeller" and Radio Spray for respiratory ailments were widely used in the '20s and '30s — one of his formulas was sold to Lederle Laboratories) to the medications he and Dr. Davis used after the advent of sulfa and antibiotics.

"Chickens get much the same diseases as all other animals," said Dungan, "but when they get sick it's on a flock basis because they are so close together. Mass treatment and mass vaccinations have always been something they've required."

Dungan speaks of the chicken's proclivity for respiratory diseases, even avian influenza, and the strides made in developing vaccines for those and for fowl pox. He also talked about the invention of "devices" 381



...competition from Arkansas and Texas and other areas of the southeast where poultry producers were promised cheap — or free — land, tax credits and easy loans by government agencies promoting the new agricultural industry. Labor was cheaper, the grain supply from up the Missouri and Arkansas rivers was endless. It became apparent that they could raise the chickens there and ship them here in refrigerated trucks and sell them cheaper than they could if they were homegrown in Penngrove or the Roblar District.

As for the laying chickens, Sonoma County hens, who laid 22 million dozen eggs a year in the 1920s and nearly 48 million dozen, or one-third of all the eggs in California, in 1949, couldn't even cluck against competition from Southern California. Here, the most forward-looking of the producers had perhaps 5,000 hens "on wires" while the new plants around Riverside, where more than 100,000 hens were kept in environmentally controlled cages could simply do it cheaper.

The glory days, when Sonoma County produced more eggs than any other county in the United States, were over.

ONE OF the memories that always pops right to the surface when old-timers reminisce is the Chicken Pharmacy. In 1923 a druggist named J.E. Keyes, seeing a market for medicines to cure the myriad diseases and conditions that plague chickens, opened his Chicken Pharmacy on Main Street. It stayed there, tucked in between Sam's Rendezvous and Stone Furniture Company ("try Stone's for soft beds"), until Washington Street pushed out and took its space.

In 1926 Keyes was joined by a veterinarian who had worked at the State Poultry Lab in Petaluma. Dr. Dave Davis had distinguished credentials and was author of a dozen publications in veterinary journals on chicken diseases. His expertise in this area was gained by careful autopsies and studies of hundreds of thousands of chicken. His contributions to poultry medicine are highly significant and many of the vaccines and medications he manufactured are still in use today.

...competition from Arkansas and Texas and other areas of the southeast where poultry producers were promised cheap — or free — land, tax credits and easy loans by government agencies promoting the new agricultural industry. Labor was cheaper, the grain supply from up the Missouri and Arkansas rivers was endless. It became apparent that they could raise the chickens there and ship them here in refrigerated trucks and sell them cheaper than they could if they were homegrown in Penngrove or the Roblar District.

IF SILLY Americans of the 1930s, who didn't know better, had snickered at the idea of a Chicken Pharmacy, their television-viewing offspring of the '50s had their fun with chicken sexers. At least once a year, it seemed, television game shows like "What's My Line" paraded a Petaluma chicken sexer before the contestants, producing laughter from the studio audience.

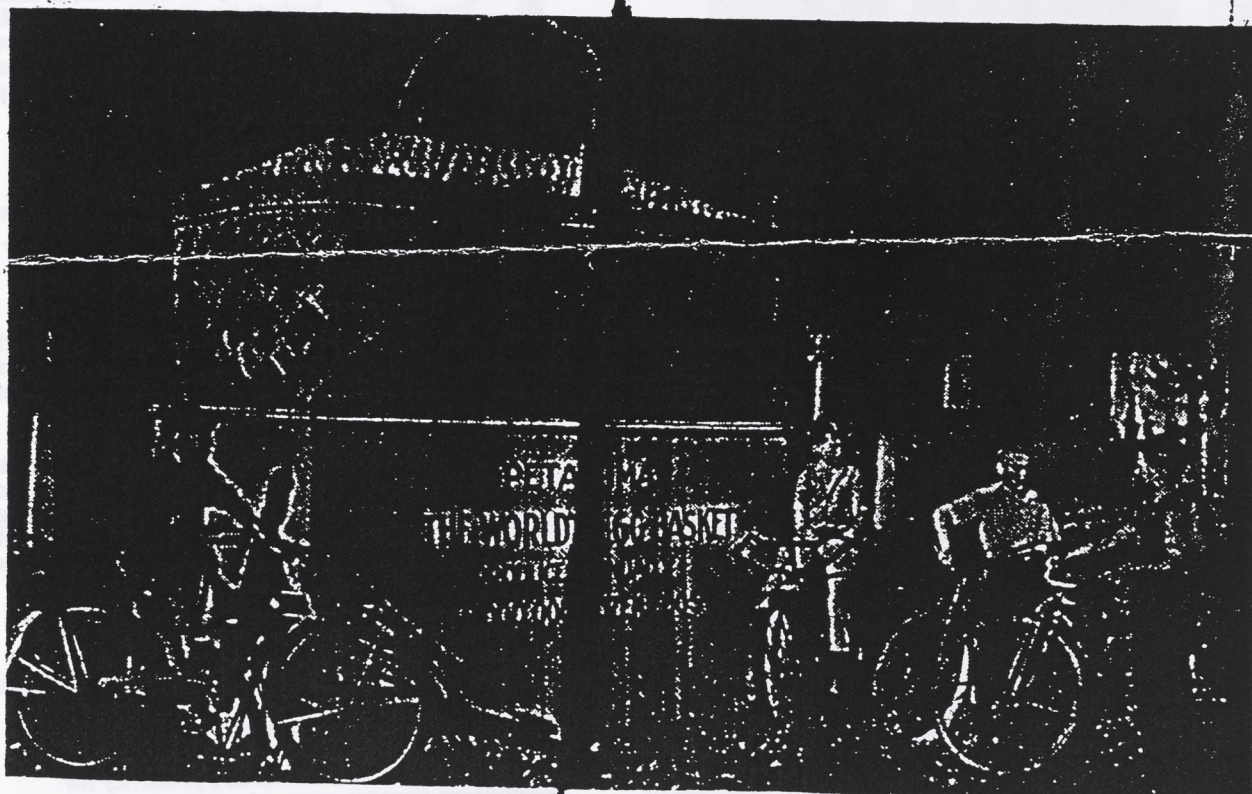
But, like the Chicken Pharmacy, in Petaluma it was serious business. Heimer "Ham" Carlson is a "born and raised." He grew up on a chicken ranch about a half-mile from where he lives now. In 1934, at age 19, he graduated in the first class from the first chicken-sexing school in the state. It was, of course, in Petaluma.

For 55 years Ham has sexed chickens. He studied three months to learn the basics. Chicken sexing is no snap. He worked all the hatcheries. He retired in 1963, but has continued to work occasionally. He was at HAM in fact, and "sexed a few" there on closing day. Chicken sexers travel, says Ham. He has sexed chickens in garages, in dining rooms, on the kitchen table. Later, it was mostly done in the hatcheries. "When I first started sexing, it was all seasonal. That's why we had to do such long hours. In Petaluma hatching was in February, March, April, maybe May." Ham estimates he has sexed some 56 million chickens and turkey poults in his career. He averages about 800 an hour. The Japanese are the fastest, he says. "Some Japanese chicken sexers can go close to 1,200 an hour. I have endurance but I never had that speed.

"I tried it once," he said. "I figured I would try to sex 1,000 an hour but it bothered my accuracy. You've got to be 99 percent accurate." Chicken sexing is piece work, says Ham. He was paid by the chick.

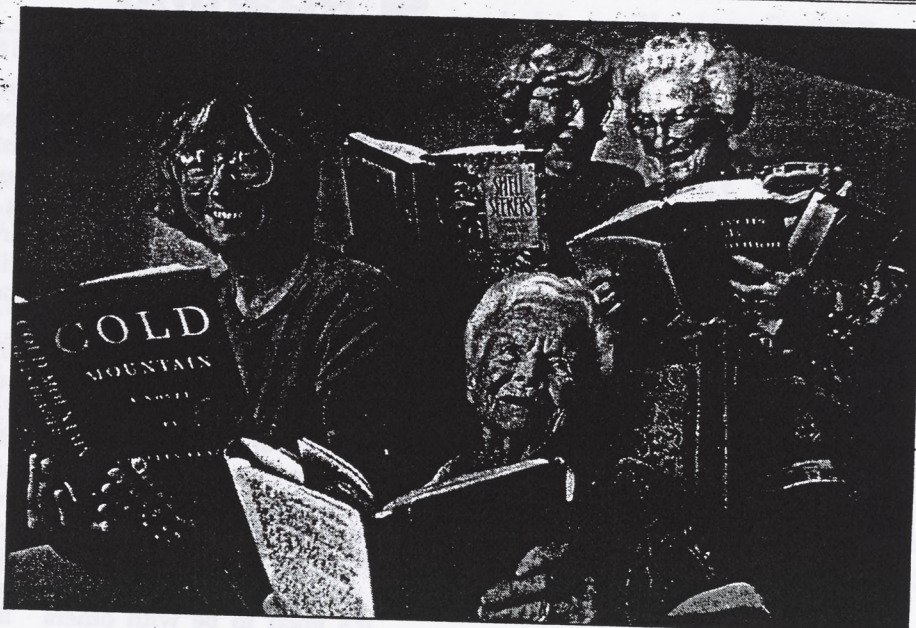
Now, from Ham Carlson, the answer to the ultimate question: How do you know? "You pick up the little bird in your hands, head away and back toward you. (When you gently invert) the vent, on the male there is a little eminence, about half the size of a pin head, firm and glossy."

OK? The clock is running. Ready, set, go.



Once a landmark, now a memory





Counterclockwise from left, Petaluma Reading Circle president Susan Corwin, early member Anna Nielsen and current members Dorothy Petersen and Gen Bauck will celebrate the club's 70th anniversary Sept. 10. Leena Hintsanen/Argus-Courier staff

# For the love of reading

*Petaluma Reading Circle members celebrate 70 years of a shared passion for books*

**By Katie Watts**  
Argus-Courier Staff

**C**lose your books, students. It's time for a brief quiz. Of the Petaluma clubs listed below, which is the only one still in existence?

Narcissus Club. Antietam Woman's Relief Corps. Spartan Girls' Club. Congenial Club. Jolly Club. Three Link Club. Petaluma Reading Circle. Bloomfield Whoopee Club. Tuesday Afternoon Bridge Club. Delphinium Club. Puritan Maidens of the Congregational Church.

You're right. It must have been that clue in the first sentence about books. It is, indeed, the Petaluma Reading Circle, which opened the first page of its history 70 years ago, in March, 1929.

The year 1929 was a great year to start a reading club," said member Gen Bauck. "Some of the books published that year were Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front," Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms," Thomas Wolfe's "Look Homeward, Angel," Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" and "Dodsworth" by Sinclair Lewis.

Recently, four club members gathered to look back at seven decades of reading.

Currently the membership stands at 20. Originally, said Dorothy Petersen, "there was a limit of 35 and they had a waiting list. All the best women in town belonged."

"I had two small children," said Anna Nielsen, who was a member in the early '30s, "and it seemed all my reading was in Parents' magazine. At that time, Mrs. Frank Green was one of the leaders and, I Knight. I knew that and it was there joined."

"You had to be invited to join," said Bauck. "Five ladies started it up, then added a few, bit by bit."

The original group, they explained, was very social and composed of families well estab-

**"Reading is such a basic human activity. People can share an interest in reading no matter what their background."**

— Susan Corwin

lished in the town. "When I first joined," Petersen said, "I was impressed by the influential women that belonged."

Unlike today's book clubs, where everyone buys copies

of the books, reads and then discusses them, the club purchases books with membership dues (currently \$15 a year, said Petersen, "but I think they started out at \$3.") Two people each read and report on a book (one fiction, one non-fiction) at the monthly meeting. After the review is complete, a small card is put in the book and the book is

passed around the group. Those wanting to read the book sign their names on the card. When a woman finishes, she is responsible for passing it on to the next reader.

The club is restricted to women. "Meetings were held in the daytime," Petersen explained, "and all the men worked. We've never had any demand, except for one man."

Club records show the first two books reviewed were Owen Wister's "The Virginian" and Hamlin Garland's "Sons of the Middle Border."

"Through the years, we've always bought hardcover books," said Bauck. "When you pass it around it lasts longer. And there's something comforting about reading a hardcover book."

A committee of three looks over book reviews, explained Susan Corwin, club president. They also follow television reviews and word of mouth. "We try to get a variety of what might be of general interest."

Petersen added, "If we have a local author, we try to include their books."

Originally, the women explained, the books were given alphabetically and a reader didn't know what book she would get. Consequently, "sometimes you didn't get a good review." Now the committee that chooses the books tries to match up the books and the reviewers.

Even so, reviews are not



Leena Hintsanen/Argus-Courier staff

These are some of the books that have been read and reviewed by the Petaluma Reading Circle over the years.



## ■ Reading

from page 21

necessarily positive. Petersen well remembered Margaret Norton's review of E.L. Doctorow's "Loon Lake." "She gave it a very good review but then she said, 'Now I want to add my own opinion - that is the worst book I have ever read.'"

Corwin reviewed Ian McEwan's "Amsterdam." "It won the Booker Prize, but the subject matter sounded depressing. I took it home and read it and concluded there might have been some bribery involved in the awarding of the prize."

What has membership in the club given them?

"It's good to be with others who also like to read," Petersen said. "Most book clubs all read the same book, then have a big discussion - that's too much like teaching for me!"

Petersen also enjoys the chance to get an early crack at a popular book. "If you put your name in at the library, you know how long it takes. Here, you feel you're up with the reading public."

Corwin said it's given her "the chance to meet some very interesting women in Petaluma. I don't think I would have met any other way."

Bauck agreed. "The joy of knowing other people that are not in my usual circle," she said, then thought and added, "I value the friends I have made in the group who are also book lovers." She, like Petersen, enjoys the opportunity to read the current books and feels her membership has "greatly expanded" her knowledge and stretched her reading interests.

All agreed with Corwin's

statement, "Reading is such a basic human activity," and feel it's a reason why the club has endured almost three-quarters of a century. "People can share an interest in reading," Corwin continued, "no matter what their background."

"I was brought up in the country," Nielsen said. "Reading was what you did."

"There wasn't much else to do," Petersen said. "No television and no video." She remembered the library only allowed you to take two books out at a time and laughed with Nielsen over one of the town's early librarians, a Miss Cassidy, "a big woman, with a big chest, who would prowls around," acting, they agreed, as though she was a policeman and those using the library criminal suspects.

"Books have always been important," Bauck said, "always a gift that was given at Christmas and birthdays."

To celebrate the circle's 70th anniversary, members will gather for a Sept. 10 luncheon. Member Carol Fullerton is planning a vintage menu and guests are urged to wear clothing that would have been proper in 1929 - including hats and gloves. "In the beginning," said Corwin dryly, "ladies did not wear pants to the meetings."

*Former past presidents interested in attending the luncheon who have not received an invitation should call Helen Farris at 762-1956 by Sept. 1. Those interested in more information on the Petaluma Reading Circle may call Susan Corwin at 763-9710.*